

THE REGARD
DUE TO
THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS
CONSIDERED;

IN

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

LORD's DAY EVENING LECTURE,
AT
HARE COURT, ALDERSGATE STREET;

NOVEMBER 17th,

1793.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Discourse was first penned without the least View to Publication. It now makes its Appearance from the Press, in Compliance with the Wishes of a few Friends, who hope that it may assist those, into whose Hands it may fall, in making a religious Improvement of the present State of Public Affairs. It is submitted with great Diffidence to the Candour of the Public, and the Divine Blessing.

THE
REGARD
DUE TO THE
DIVINE JUDGMENTS,
&c.

ISAIAH xxvi. 9.

— *For when thy Judgments are in the Earth,
the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.*

MAN hath three grand sources of religious instruction open to him in the volumes of Nature, Providence, and Revelation. All these daily invite our serious regard.

The book of Nature remains the same which it was at the commencement of the world ; every kind of plants and animals which now exists being then formed. But yet, there is an endless variety in its beautiful pages ; and every part of the visible creation will afford new delight and improvement

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to those who examine it with that minute attention it deserves.

The volume of Revelation is also complete. We are not to expect any new discoveries of the Divine Will ; yet every day throws fresh light on the contents of the Bible, and renders its excellence and use more conspicuous.

But Divine Providence is constantly producing new events, or at least, events which have the appearance of novelty. It is indeed strongly intimated by the wise man, that there is no new thing under the sun. “ Is there “ any thing whereof it may be said, see this “ is new * ? ” Nothing which takes place in the world deserves, strictly speaking, to be so called.

Mankind, in all ages, have been governed by similar motives ; the same causes have wrought similar effects, and must still be expected to do so.

But though in many instances a similarity may appear between one event and another, which we are led to compare ; yet in others, is there not such a dissimilarity as strikes us at least with the air of novelty ?

* Eccles. i. 10.

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It is the duty of a Christian, every day, as opportunity offers, to examine these three instructive volumes of which I have been speaking. The lovely productions of one part of nature, and the more sublime and magnificent productions of another, should direct our thoughts and affections to the great Author of being, and source of excellence, who adorns the garden with its various beauties, gives the fertile field its power to supply both man and beast, and imparts to the tumultuous ocean and the spangled firmament, the awful majesty and splendour they possess.

And surely, if the volume of Nature deserves to be read with diligence, the volume of Inspiration should be perused with no less care. "Thy word," says the Psalmist, "is "a light unto my feet, and a lamp unto my "path *."

Nor ought the dispensations of Divine Providence by any means to be overlooked by us. "Who so is wise, and will observe those "things, even they shall understand the lo- "ving-kindness of the Lord."

* Ps. cxix. 105.

It is universally admitted, that events have taken place in the present day, of the most interesting nature. To be altogether ignorant of them, men must be secluded from society ; and to be indifferent to them, they must be regardless of some of the most important interests of mankind. If ever there was a time in which the judgments of God were in the earth, this is the time. May God grant that the words of our text may have their accomplishment, that the inhabitants of the world may learn righteousness.

The chapter from whence our text is taken is a sacred song, composed to be sung when certain glorious prophecies which occur in the preceding chapter, should have their accomplishment. The Prophet takes notice of the conduct which the people of God would pursue in troublesome times, v. 8. " In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee ;" i. e. when chastised, we have looked to no other hand but thine for relief. Our desires have been towards thee.

The Prophet also foretells, for the encouragement of them that fear God, what will be the effect of the divine visitations. For
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when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

From this passage of scripture, I shall take occasion to make the three following observations :

I. There are times in which God visits nations with the peculiar marks of his displeasure.

II. The design of these judgments is to communicate moral and religious instruction to men.

III. It deeply concerns all those who are under the divine judgments, to endeavour to comply with this design, and derive instruction from them.

I. I observe, that there are times in which God visits nations, with the peculiar marks of his displeasure:

We are taught in part by the light of nature, and more fully by revelation, that God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Hence arises this important fact, that as men sow, they certainly reap. Sin brings with it its own punishment; and righteousness, through the mediation of Jesus, its

own reward. Yet it must be acknowledged, that this doth not fully appear in the present state. The ungodly, not unfrequently enjoy great prosperity. “ Lo, these are the ungodly that prosper in the world, they increase in riches.” Schemes of the blackest kind are sometimes suffered to succeed ; and the worst of men often attain the highest posts in society. “ I have seen the wicked, says David, in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree.”

On the other hand, the sincere and ardent friends of religion at times languish in obscurity and affliction. But the proceedings of the great day will throw light over these mysterious dispensations. The wicked have their good things here, and will afterwards be tormented ; the righteous have their evil things, but will then be comforted.

But although the rewards and punishments which correspond with the characters of individuals, be principally deferred to a future state, nations, if rewarded or punished at all, must be rewarded or punished here. In the present state alone such communities exist, and

and therefore here only are they capable of receiving providential smiles and frowns.

Accordingly, it will be found, that the happiness of nations is in proportion to their regard to the sacred precepts of religion ; and that when these have been notoriously violated, the wrath of God has been displayed against them. God bears long with offending creatures before he executes his wrath ; but when their iniquities are at the height, vengeance will sleep no longer.

On this subject, the faithful pages of history throw the greatest light. Trace that of the Jews through its various periods, and you will find, that when they were willing and obedient, they eat the good of the land ; but when they walked contrary to God, he also walked contrary to them.

And was not the wrath of God poured out also on other guilty nations, of whom we read in the sacred volume ? Nay, were not all the inhabitants of the old world, excepting righteous Noah and his family, overwhelmed by the universal deluge ? Did not Sodom and Gomorrah, whose crimes are notorious, fall by the consuming flames ? The guilt of

Egypt was at its height, when it's impious Monarch declared that he knew not the Lord, neither would he let the people of Israel go. And what was the consequence of this opposition, in which his people shared with him ? Divine visitations of the most awful kind.

And did not Nineveh and Babylon, and the famed cities of Greece and Rome, meet also with overwhelming judgments, when the measure of their iniquity was filled up ?

But we need not have recourse to ancient history to prove, that there are seasons in which the judgments of God are peculiarly abroad in the earth. Look at the events of the present day : you know their origin and their progress. Mighty changes have been predicted, both by men of religion and of the world *, to take place in that country, where at present confusion reigns. Its inhabitants

* The ingenious and polite, but unprincipled Earl of Chesterfield, seems to have discovered no small share of political sagacity in his conjectures in the year 1752, respecting France. Letter 245 of his third volume contains many striking particulars, when they are compared with recent events in that part of the world.

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had long lain in a state of servitude to popery and arbitrary power. At length, however, enlightened on the subject of government, feeling their chains, and encouraged by the successful exertions of a foreign country, which, by a mistaken policy, their rulers assisted, they attempted emancipation at home. The attempt was noble, the design was great. Every true friend to liberty, the British Constitution, and the happiness of man, wished them to succeed.

The prospect was fair and beautiful; but alas! a thick cloud soon gathered and darkened it. Human nature is addicted to extremes. Unforeseen circumstances arose, that disconcerted the plan which wisdom and moderation had formed.

Another revolution took place, which has produced effects so strange, so awful, and the issue of which is so uncertain, that we are ready to say, a new thing is created in the earth. Royalty bleeds, Nobility is proscribed, Ecclesiastics are banished with unrelenting severity, and the people at large are involved in calamities of the most dreadful nature. And are not surrounding nations involved in troubles

troubles also ? Britain, though her soil hath not been stained by the blood of the slain, yet suffers in her manufactures, in her commerce, in the loss of her treasures, and in that of her sons.

The distresses occasioned by the present commotions on the Continent, are felt more or less by all the nations of Europe.

Nor has America been without the tokens of the divine displeasure. We were ready indeed to congratulate our brethren across the Atlantic, on their exemption from the woes by which Europe is visited. But though they have escaped the havock of the sword, they have felt the horrors of the pestilence, and thus God hath shewn them he has more arrows than one in his quiver. Surely, sirs, the judgments of God are abroad in the earth. But,

II. Let us proceed to consider the design of these awful visitations; viz. to communicate moral and religious instructions to men.

When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Now what lessons are such events intended to teach us ?

1. That whatever infidels may suggest to the contrary, God certainly is observant of the conduct, and superintends the affairs of his creatures. It has been doubted whether speculative atheism can possibly exist, but it is indisputable that there is much practical atheism in the world.

There is alas too much of it in our own country. In France there appears to be much more, if we may judge from the contempt with which almost every thing sacred is there treated.

The fact seems to be, that not distinguishing between the absurd tenets, and superstitious ceremonies of popery and the solid truths, and reasonable laws of christianity, in their zeal to get rid of the former, they have also rejected the latter. A due regard to God is indeed very rare among the children of men. When nations have enjoyed a high degree of prosperity, and attained great weight in the political scale, pride, luxury, and forgetfulness of the most high, become too prevalent. Vengeance delayed is apt to be despised ; because judgments are not immediately felt, they are not feared.

God

God intends therefore by severe visitations, to rouse men from this criminal stupor, to compel them to confess his existence and perfections, that he ruleth in the earth, and therefore that sin shall not always go unpunished.

2. God designs by his judgments, to teach men the necessity of an immediate and thorough reformation.

If the minds of men were properly disposed, nothing would give them a stronger idea of the guilt of disobedience to the divine will, than reflections upon the divine goodness. But unhappily, when enjoyments abound, they are apt to sacrifice to their own vanity, to harden their hearts, and to put far off the evil day.

The judgments of God are designed, therefore, to awaken them from their delusive dreams. "In their affliction, it may be hoped "they will call upon God."

Adversity hath its benefits, as prosperity hath its snares.

An universal reformation under national calamities, though devoutly to be wished, may not indeed take place. But is there not encouragement

couragement to expect, that many shall fear and turn unto the Lord ?

I confess I am not a little consoled, amidst the storms which at present threaten the nations of Europe, with the prospect of a brighter day. “ God doth not afflict willingly, “ nor grieve the children of men. If he correct, it is in measure and mercy, or else he “ would bring us to nothing.”

Let us not despair. It is nothing new for God to defeat the designs of his enemies. Infidelity at present, with more than common insolence, lifts up its haughty head, but perhaps as Whiston intimates, Antichrist shall fall by its hands. It is not easy to erect the simple but majestic fabric of pure christianity, amidst the rubbish of popery. But that wretched system, to support which, both the civil and religious rights of mankind have been ignobly sacrificed, is happily falling to decay. Let it fall, it has slain its thousands, and its tens of thousands.

So far as the events of the present period, contribute to the downfall of the man of sin, we may say when considering them, “ It is “ the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in

“ our

“ our eyes.” Let us hope, that through the wisdom and grace of God, the commotions which now agitate the world, will in the issue, effectually subserve the cause of religion. Men contend for sovereignty over one another, but God principally regards the growing empire of his son.

III. But I hasten to observe, that it deeply concerns all those who are under the divine judgments, to derive that instruction from them, which they are intended to convey.

And here I wish to apply the subject, particularly to ourselves. It cannot be denied that we are under providential frowns. But what improvement should we make of our present situation ?

In the 1st. place, let us be truly thankful to God, that although we suffer in common with other countries, yet we are not the principal sufferers.

By the effects of the present unhappy war, the splendid prosperity which Britain lately enjoyed, is for a time eclipsed ; yet which of her sons would exchange his native land for any other country in Europe ?

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Do not the protection afforded our persons*, property and good name, and the full liberty we have to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, demand from us a tribute of respect to our civil governors, and of gratitude to God? Evils no doubt exist in this country, which require reformation, but none exist which demand a revolution. While we admit, (and who can deny it) the right of all nations, to choose by decided majorities, the particular forms of government they shall establish, we have long had reason (and surely the confusions on the Continent have not a little strengthened it) to triumph in our own. The true spirit of the British constitution is equally repugnant to the tyranny of despots, and the licentiousness of democracy.

It appears to me to be a duty, under present circumstances, to be peculiarly thankful to God on this account.

* The zeal with which some respectable characters have lately been prosecuted, on a charge of sedition, has arisen, I hope, not from the wish of our civil governors, to check a spirit of free and candid political discussion, but rather from the circumstances of the times, which leading them strenuously to oppose violent measures on one side, have perhaps given rise to measures somewhat too strong on the other.

2. Let us humble ourselves under our national calamities, that they may not be increased. A time of affliction should be a time of humiliation. God hath a controversy with us, though we have reason to sing of mercy, as well as of judgment. His hand is stretched out against us. What the end of our present troubles will be it is impossible to say: As a nation we have certainly demerited the severest judgments, but if we reform, the ruin we have deserved may be mercifully prevented. He therefore will be found the best patriot who exhibits the purest example of repentance, reformation, and universal goodness. Let us then break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by turning unto the Lord. To conclude,

3. Let us exert ourselves to the utmost, to subserve the great designs of God, in the judgments that he inflicts upon others. How long soever the present unhappy contest with our neighbours may continue, still let us remember they are our fellow-creatures, and entitled to our regard. Circumstances may arise which justify going to war, but no circumstances will justify a spirit of hatred and malevolence.

*The ways
Harry Wood*

malevolence. Love your enemies is one of the noblest precepts of christianity ; let us endeavour by Divine grace, to imbibe its genuine spirit. Then shall we pray for France as well as Britain ; not that in her boasted zeal for liberty, she may insult with impunity, a nation, whose liberties at present are superior to her own (forbid it patriotism) ; nor on the other hand, that extirpation may overtake her for her crimes (forbid it humanity) ; but that her present calamities may humble her lofty spirit, and lead her to acknowledge the rights of God and surrounding nations ; and that peace, a wise government, and religion, untainted with the corruptions of the papal system, may be established throughout her territories. Amen.

THE END.

